

I should take this opportunity to comment on the rules of this game. There have already been two editions of the rules and a British correction to the second edition. Those who already have the game from America should check up to see which edition they have. Apart from a rewrite of two paragraphs in the spotting rules in the British version the only changes are corrections of typographical errors. The second edition of the rules referred to in Moves issue 40 is probably already in your hands but the errata is outstanding. This article is based on the American 2nd edition rules. **Editor.**

WAR OF THE RING



B. LAIDLAW



The Games of Middle Earth are SPI's simulation of the struggle for the "One Ruling Ring of Power" as described in JRR Tolkien's epic trilogy "The Lord of the Rings". The complete package comprises three games:

- War of the Ring** (SR 1418-1419); which marked the end of the Third Age in Middle Earth;
- Gondor**, the siege of Minas Tirith in SR 1419;
- Sauron**; the battle for the Ring at the end of the Second Age which led to the fall of Sauron and set the scene for the final struggle.

Sauron and Gondor are quad size simulations which are available separately if required. In my view they complement the large game nicely and the set would prove rather expensive if they were to be purchased separately later. In the article however I intend to deal only with **War of the Ring** which is the main simulation and, unlike the other two, introduces systems which, to me at any rate, are new since this is my first sortie into the world of fantasy gaming.

One Game to Bind Them All

The game by its very nature will appeal to a much wider market than the usual SPI production and consequently the graphics and box-art are designed to have instant appeal. The coversheet depicting the duel between Gandalf the Grey and the Balrog in the tunnels of Moria, is stunning. It suggests conflict, magic and terror (at the same time), and should be enough to make the most casual observer want to examine the contents more closely. Inside he will find that the standard is excellently maintained. The game maps are superb, covering the lands of the Middle Earth as they are shown in Tolkien's novel, and are a feast of colour in comparison to the purely functional presentation of the average SPI wargame terrain. There are lots of extra goodies too; Magic Cards (Mithril Mail, Magic Swords); Event Cards (Gollum attempts to seize the Ring); and Search Cards depicting 'orrible Orcs and nasty Nazgul. The Character Cards are a delight from the appealing pictures of the dear little Hobbits (Boo!) to the dark and powerful portrait of the Lord of the Nazgul (Hooray!) (Gollum incidentally looks like a diminutive "Robin Day" sans specs and bow tie). To tempt the veteran gamer there are 400 counters in myriad colours representing armies of Elves, Dwarves, Orcs and Trolls as well as the major individual characters, suggesting ostensibly a refreshing change from armour, artillery and aircraft.

The Hobbit Principle

In the prologue to the first volume of Lord of the Rings there is a sentence which reads "Hobbits delighted in such things—(books)—if they were accurate: they liked to have books filled with things that they already knew set out fair and square with no contradictions".

Oh dear, quite a responsibility for SPI that, to stay within such clearly defined parameters when drafting the rules folder and games systems. Indeed games designers generally have rarely if ever drafted a set of rules which would be acceptable to a discerning Hobbit and alas this present work is no exception. Not only are there several grey areas and obvious contradictions but the apparent care-

lessness with which the rules booklet was finished is evidenced by some annoying typographical errors. None of these things it is stressed, are fatal to the game system and indeed we are urged in the rules introduction to use common sense and knowledge of the book to ensure any questions which cannot be resolved by reference to the rules. However we have seen that SPI have tried to capture a wider market with the game and one would have expected therefore that more attention would have been paid to the niceties in the presentation. After all, a customer who is confused or frustrated by his first purchase will rarely return and few of these newcomers to the hobby will be familiar with gaming press and errata systems. In this instance the second edition of the rule book* may be greeted with a tattoo of banging stable doors.

.....and so to play

The game simulates Sauron's struggle against the Fellowship to regain control of the Ring and the Fellowship attempt to thwart this plan by destroying the Ring in the fires of Mt. Doom. There are three versions of the game which we will consider in turn.

The Character Game

This serves as an introduction to the game but is important in its own right in that the armies which are introduced in the Campaign Game are not essential to the ultimate disposition of the Ring.

Starting from Rivendell the nine members of the Fellowship, aided by magic bluff and to a certain extent the limitations placed on the Dark Power player must fight and sneak their way into Mordor wherein lies the Crack of Doom. The Dark Power player wins either by bringing the Ring to his stronghold at Barad-Dur or he can achieve a military victory by capturing three of the Fellowship citadels.

The Fellowship counters are inverted and will normally be split into small parties to gather magical items that they will need on their quest; to keep the Dark Power player's forces split, and to keep him guessing. Strewn along the possible paths that Frodo the Ringbearer, and his pals must take are the Servants of Sauron (Balrog, Shelob, a Renegade Troll and Barrow Wight plus two blank cards) who must be overcome in combat before the survivors can proceed further.

Meanwhile back in Mordor, the Dark Power player (representing Sauron) is dicing up a supply of Shadow Points which he uses to move his forces, search for the Fellowship characters or attempt citadel reduction. Every turn he'll struggle to find enough points to carry out his plans as he is not allowed to accumulate the SP's (Apparently Mordor technology does not run to wing-tanks for the Nazguls flying beasts). He gets two chances per turn to spot Frodo and Co., first during his search phase when he draws a card which indicates the regions he may search with Orcs or Nazgul; secondly he may conduct a search whenever Fellowship characters move through a hex containing Nazgul or Orcs. Why would they do a stupid thing like that? Well, the Fellowship is obliged at times to use mountain passes and paths through

impassable terrain so the Nazgul simply block the exits! In any event they can certainly blockade the Fellowship groups and force them into unfavourable terrain to impede their progress.

Both players have a running supply of three Event-Cards which they may play at any time during a game turn. These 39 cards represent incidents from the novel e.g. Tom Bombadil intervenes against Barrow Wights, Rescue by Eagles, Shadow of Sauron etc. Many of these are used only in the Campaign game but in any version of the game shrewd use of these cards can frustrate the best laid plans of either side.

Once a member of the Fellowship is spotted he is liable to be captured by Orcs and led back to Barad-Dur (he has chances to escape) or challenged to individual combat by Nazgul or one of the more powerful of Sauron's hit men.

Designer Richard Berg has said in reply to another article on this game that individual combat is odd and not meant to be realistic since the attempt is being made to appeal to a non-wargaming public. This is certainly so. For example if Frodo, armed with a magic sword, and Gandalf are spotted by four Nazgul and the Nazgul want to fight, the dynamic duo can't refuse so Frodo squares up to Nazgul No. 1. Gandalf and the other three Nazgul discuss the weather. Frodo wins and Nazgul 2 takes up cudgels. Frodo wins again and by now is half dead (he isn't wearing the Ring). Nazgul 3 steps up; can Gandalf step in and take over to save his little mate? The rules don't say but I would think so, otherwise Frodo is a sitting duck.

Combat is resolved by a comparison of fighting strengths (combat and morale values). If there is a difference of 2 (say) then the stronger fighter uses the +2 column on the CRT and the weaker -2. These differences are further added to as wounds are sustained. The die rolls of both combatants can indicate damage to both attacker and defender but the rules do not state whether or not these are added together before taking advantage of the wearing of Mithril Mail. This armour reduces a 1 wound result to nil and anything above that is treated as 1 wound. If the results are not added together before the adjustment is made then an undamaged Frodo wearing the Ring and Mithril Mail and wielding a magic sword is literally invincible against a Nazgul who does not use sorcery. Frodo does of course suffer the liabilities of wearing the Ring but has an 83% chance of taking it off next turn. Sorcery can be employed by certain characters on both sides to a greater or lesser degree. Logic (and the book?) would suggest that Mithril Mail is no defence against this form of combat but even so the Nazgul rank and file have only a 50% chance of scoring a hit in any combat round. The Sorcery CRT however indicates damage to the defender only; so the lesson is clear, if in doubt, whip out your wand.

A military victory by citadel reductions is almost a non-starter. Nazgul may not enter Fellowship citadels until a Hobbit is spotted or turn 7 whichever is earlier. The careful Fellowship player should be well on his way by then and of course there are the accursed Shadow Points to consider if an attack against a citadel is to be made. The game is said by some to be weighted against the Dark Power player. I haven't played against sufficient different opponents to form a conclusive viewpoint but I would suggest that the more experienced gamer should play Sauron since it is certainly the more demanding task.

The Campaign Game

This develops the character game into a more faithful simulation of the novel by the introduction of armies, extra characters and event cards. Victory conditions are much the same apart from the provision for a military victory by the Fellowship.

The armies counters suggest various combat types, cavalry, swordsmen, axes, spears etc. but apart from the extra movement allowance for cavalry there is no functional difference between them. Many of the counters are simply used as "change" to split the various army groups to cover extra terrain or reflect losses through attrition.

Most of my reservations and enthusiasms for the character game remain valid in this version and the

* (Mentioned in Moves 40)

added complexity brings added interest in proportionate amounts. The Dark Powers are still stuck with the Shadow Points which now are also used to initiate army combat. He must expend points both to attack and to defend and the Fellowship should therefore pressurise Sauron on as many fronts as possible.

Fellowship characters in the same hex as friendly army units cannot be spotted or captured but since army units cannot move until they are mobilised this is not the advantage it may, at first, appear to be. Fellowship armies are generally mobilised when Sauron invades various provinces and he in turn may mobilise only when a Hobbit is spotted or at the latest game turn 7.

Armies are led by various characters who are also able to bring their influence to bear on combat results. Army movement and combat, together with the extra event cards also bring a lot more of the game map into play than is usual in the character game, and some of the extra characters, such as Elrond, who can cure wounds, can themselves open up a whole new range of strategic possibilities.

The Three Player Game

This is my favourite version of the game though I must add that I love multi-player games anyway. It is also the version which least reflects the book. Saruman's part has been padded out, Hollywood style, to make him competitive but only the most pedantic purist will find fault with that.

To play this version you'll need the expanded rules published in Moves 37. The original rules published with the game are barely adequate and the small extra expense is a great investment.

From experience I can say that it is a daunting task which faces the Fellowship player unless he keeps his cool. The Fellowship may ally with Saruman but Saruman needs the Ring to win so it's always an uneasy partnership. Even during such an alliance Saruman may search for the Ring, and has his own band of Orcs to do so. If the Bad guys gang up on the Fellowship then he should gather his magic cards quickly as Saruman will also be collecting them for himself. The more likely event is that the Fellowship will get no alliance until Saruman gains the Ring and needs help to hold it from Sauron.

Saruman has a tough nut to crack if he is to win. He must gain the Ring and then attempt to control the surviving Nazgul as well as holding military objectives. In this game the best player should take Saruman and if pressed for a verdict I would say that while it is difficult for Saruman to win he certainly makes Sauron's task easier.

And in the end.....

Errata; I would say is of two kinds. The first is the annoying unnecessary type which results from inadequate play testing and careless production. The second results from the experiences and suggestions of gamers and could more adequately be described as post-publication development. This game has and will benefit from both. We have seen that the 3 player game has been enhanced until it is now I think the most exciting of the contests. Tolkien buffs can see that the game systems are steeped in the atmosphere of the novel and with a little thought it is a subtle and rewarding game while play is in mid-session. However one major snag remains.

Whatever gambits the Fellowship players may employ his forces must eventually converge on Mordor. Moreover Sauron can follow his progress which was not so in the novel. Indeed Sauron was unaware that Mt. Doom was Frodo's ultimate destination.

Each side may weaken the other during the quest but sooner or later the Fellowship will approach the Crack of Doom either in force or separately. Sauron will then simply call all his available forces to the Mt. Doom hex and conduct a search. If the search fails the Ringbearer pops the Ring into the volcano. If the search succeeds the game ends in a frustrating bloodbath.

What is needed of course is a set of hidden movement rules which would rocket the game into brand new orbit. Any takers? The game is certainly worth it.

SINAI

GAME PROBLEM

M.G.STONER



Sinai Solution can be found on page 11

During the early stages of a 1967 Historical game of Sinai the Israeli player sent a powerful and highly mobile force across the Sinai. It was soon surrounded by a large Egyptian group but he wasn't too worried, his units were still in automatic supply. Three Egyptian units had been put out of supply (unable to trace a line of hexes free of enemy ZOC's to hex 0732) and most of the Egyptians would probably panic anyway. However the Egyptian player rolled a six for command control and *none* of his units were affected, he then proceeded to destroy *all* of the Israeli force in one movement and one combat phase.

Could *you* have done it?

N.B. Your method must be 100% foolproof i.e. it must work whatever die roll you get when you attack.

For those of you without Sinai: Movement precedes combat; ZOC's halt movement but combat is voluntary; the CRT is a differential type; all results are retreats; a retreat is assured at +4; units may not enter rough terrain hexes; if unsupplied, defence and movement halved (round down) no attacks allowed; overruns possible and cost 3 MPS; and both sides will fight with double defence strengths if unable to retreat.

SET-UP

Unit	Designation	Type	Hex
1-8	Arie	Recon	0833
1-15-1	AW	Airmobile	1034
9-8	Shml	Armour	0934
9-8	Elhn	Armour	0935

Unit	Designation	Type	Hex
4-1	-	Inf.	0933
3-5	-	Mech	0837
4-4	-	Mech	0731
3-4	-	Mech	1331
3-4	-	Mech	1331
5-5	40	Armour	0733
5-5	1	Armour	1037
5-5	141	Armour	1037

